

“Developments in Afghanistan”

Prepared Statement of

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Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee

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Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, and members of the committee: thank you for inviting us here to testify today, and for reporting out S. 3454, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011. I greatly appreciate this committee's support for authorities that assist our war-fighters in stability, counterterrorism, and counterinsurgency operations. The Commanders' Emergency Response Program and the authority to reimburse coalition partners are critical to field commanders, and we're grateful for your ongoing support.

My testimony today will address our efforts to improve the capacity of the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF), support the Afghan Government in improving governance and security, and plan for reconstruction and economic development. I will also outline the progress being made in Helmand and Kandahar provinces, and discuss issues of reconciliation and reintegration.

Let me start by recapping some of the key events and decisions of the past year and a half. As I noted when I last briefed you in February, the United States and our Afghan and international partners were confronted by a bleak situation when President Obama took office. Early gains against the Taliban had eroded, the Taliban and associated insurgent groups had reconstituted in safe-havens along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Afghan confidence in the Coalition was in decline.

As you know, President Obama ordered an immediate strategy review, and in the course of that preliminary review we made a number of key changes. We grew our force by 38,000 troops, and NATO appointed General McChrystal as Commander of ISAF (COMISAF). Perhaps most importantly, General McChrystal quickly implemented a counter-insurgency strategy that prioritizes protecting the Afghan people over killing the enemy.

In December of last year, after an extensive strategic review, the President announced a number of key refinements to our strategy, including the deployment of 30,000 additional U.S. servicemen and women. As of June 2, over 18,000 of

these additional troops had already deployed, and the remainder will be in place by the end of the summer. Our own troops will be joined by over 9,000 additional NATO and partner nation troops – some 2,000 more troops than were pledged by our allies and partners in January 2010. Approximately 60% of the NATO and partner troops are currently in place in Afghanistan, and more will arrive in the coming months. We are concerned about the possible loss or reduction of the Dutch contingent in Uruzgan Province, as well as by the Canadian plan to end their military mission in Afghanistan in 2011. We continue to work with both nations to find ways through which they can demonstrate their continued commitment to our shared goals in Afghanistan.

Counterinsurgency in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces

Currently, the main operational effort for ISAF and our Afghan partners continues to be in the Central Helmand River Valley and Kandahar. For ISAF and our Afghan partners, the Helmand operations have been the first large-scale effort to fundamentally change how we do business. Our focus in these operations is on protecting the population and fostering security and governance capacity, and our preparations for the Helmand operation included extraordinary levels of civil-military planning and engagement with the Afghans – from our ANSF partners, to Afghan ministries, to local tribes and populations. Ultimately, the operation was approved and ordered by President Karzai.

We have made significant progress in establishing security, which is a precondition for enhancing governance and expanding development. Today, our Coalition forces are contesting the insurgency more effectively, in more places, and with more forces.

But even as we make progress, we face continued challenges. In both April and May, we saw resumed insurgent activity in Marjah, and an expansion of insurgent capacity throughout Central Helmand. Insurgents carried out numerous high profile attacks in Kandahar City. This renewed insurgent activity has disrupted governance efforts and prompted several NGOs to plan withdrawal from the area. The insurgency is both resilient and resourceful, and the upsurge in violence demonstrates this.

Nonetheless, the nature of recent insurgent attacks is beginning to show trends consistent with a reduction in the insurgents' operational capability. For example, the percentage of complex attacks (those employing more than one means of attack) has steadily dropped since a peak in February and the average number of casualties per attack is below 2009 levels. As nascent security, governance and development initiatives begin to unfold, we are also seeing increased signs of

popular resistance to insurgent demands. Insurgents continue to seek to influence the population through assassination and other intimidation tactics, but local Afghans in the region have shown an increased willingness to report suspected IEDs and insurgent weapons caches, another indicator that the insurgent attacks are becoming less effective. These incidents suggest growing pockets of confidence among ordinary people, and a willingness to support ISAF and Afghan efforts to establish security and governance in the region.

Let me also say a bit about Kandahar. Kandahar is the heart of the Pashtun-dominated south, and it is a key population center that serves as a hub of several major trade routes. It is also the spiritual center of the Taliban. In Kandahar, we are taking an incremental approach, gradually expanding efforts to improve local governance in key districts as Coalition and ANSF operations improve the security situation.

You have expressed concern about the impact local powerbrokers have on our efforts in Kandahar. We share this concern. Our goal, as you know, is to foster transparent, effective and accountable democratic governance in Afghanistan – yet we recognize that there are ways in which our own contracting practices have had unintended consequences. The large sums of money spent by the U.S. and other Coalition partners to support operational requirements – including trucking, personal security contractors, and construction – have concentrated wealth among the relatively small number of Afghans who control those companies able to execute the required support operations.

GEN Petraeus and ADM Mullen have created a two-star task force (in coordination with Under Secretary Carter's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics office) to examine our contracting practices. Our goal is to find ways to reduce these unintended consequences of our contracting practices. When we have evidence of corruption, we will also work with the Afghan Government to prosecute those who have violated the law.

Growing the Capacity of the ANSF and Improving Security

Our efforts to increase the strength and capability of the ANSF remain key both to the long-term security and stability of Afghanistan, and to our ability to draw our own forces down, in accordance with the timeline President Obama has laid out.

These efforts are showing progress, though here too, significant challenges remain. We continue to work to improve retention and decrease attrition in the ANSF, and to improve the quality of the force. We are also partnering ISAF with the ANSF at all levels, from the Ministries of Defense and Interior down to the

small unit level, with the aim of intensively mentoring the ANSF and growing the next generation of leaders.

In the face of continued shortfalls, we are engaging in aggressive diplomatic efforts to encourage our international partners to provide additional institutional trainers and mentoring teams for the ANSF. A series of NATO meetings over the last six months – including last week’s Defense Ministerial – focused heavily on addressing these shortfalls.

Currently, the Afghan National Army (ANA) stands at 125,694 soldiers, which is well above our target of 116,500 for this time period, and is on schedule to meet our goal of 134,000 for fiscal year 2010. The Afghan National Police (ANP) numbered 105,873 as of early June, and the Ministry of the Interior is on track to reach its goal of 109,000 police by the end of the fiscal year. Beginning in fiscal year 2011, the security ministries’ goals are to build the ANA to 171,600 troops, and the ANP to 134,000 officers. We think these goals are achievable.

Formed in November 2009 and led by LTG William Caldwell, the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) is working closely with the MoD and MoI on several initiatives to improve recruiting, training, retention, and attrition. Recent salary and benefit initiatives have addressed pay disparities between ANA and ANP forces, and our initial assessment suggests these initiatives have led to improved retention and attrition rates. Literacy programs have also proven to be a positive incentive for recruitment and retention.

Further, we believe that rising end-strength numbers will also have a positive impact on retention and attrition rates. The Afghan Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior are also instituting ANA and ANP unit rotation schedules, to reduce the strains associated with indefinite deployments and to provide greater opportunity for security personnel to be home with their families. We believe that this effort will also reduce attrition rates.

Training the police remains our greatest challenge, but we have taken important steps to ensure that the Afghan police we put into the field are better trained and more capable. The MoI has implemented a revised ANP development model so that all recruits receive adequate training before they are deployed. We have raised the capacity to conduct ANP training by 400 percent over the course of the past 12 months. Additionally, the MoI has sought to institutionalize best practices, in part by creating institutions such as the new Recruiting and Training Commands.

Through the Focused District Development program, we and our Coalition partners have provided follow-on training for Afghan Uniformed Police in 83

districts, and the Focused Border Development program is accomplishing the same for the Afghan Border Police. In coordination with NTM-A, the MoI has also initiated planning to address leadership and professional development issues and to identify ways to counter corruption. The NTM-A/Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) is working with the MoI to institute a competitive officer selection and promotion process that is transparent and merit based. COMISAF has directed that the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) partnering program be expanded to provide direct mentoring, and today, nearly 85 percent of the ANA are fully partnered with ISAF forces as they operate in the field.

Transition

We are also working on several other fronts to ensure a gradual transition of responsibility to the Afghan government. At NATO’s Tallinn Foreign Ministerial in April, the ministers approved a framework for transition. Based on this decision, NATO Senior Civilian Representative Mark Sedwill and GEN McChrystal are now engaging more formally and intensively with the Afghan government to develop a joint Afghan-international community transition plan. This plan is expected to be presented during the Kabul Conference in July.

I want to emphasize that “transition” does not mean abandonment or withdrawal. We are committed to supporting the people of Afghanistan over the long-term, and we will not walk away from this commitment. Nonetheless, we cannot and should not remain in a combat role indefinitely. The transition to Afghan responsibility will be a conditions-based process, one through which the Afghan government, over time, assumes increasing responsibility for security and other government functions throughout the country, with continued ISAF support.

The scope and pace of that transition will depend on circumstances on the ground. But as the international military presence begins to shift from a combat role to an advise-and-assist role, it will be absolutely vital to ensure a more robust and long-term international civilian assistance effort focused on capacity building, governance and development.

U.S. and Afghan Government Long-Term Partnership

In January 2010, at the London Conference, President Karzai reaffirmed his government’s commitment to establish security and good governance, fight corruption, increase economic development, and improve regional cooperation, among other issues. In May, President Karzai and fourteen members of his cabinet visited Washington for a Strategic Dialogue to follow up on the London conference. Their meetings with President Obama and U.S. cabinet officials

reinforced the long-term and vital partnership between our two countries, in areas ranging from security to governance and economic development.

Senior DoD officials met with a large cadre of capable Afghan officials who are implementing programs that meet our shared objectives. President Karzai's visit underscored international cooperation and support for the mission in Afghanistan, and also highlighted the continuing support among Afghans for U.S. Government involvement in Afghanistan. President Karzai visited Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where he met with our wounded warriors, and Ft. Campbell, Kentucky, where he thanked soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division as they departed for Afghanistan. We do feel that our Afghan partners appreciate the sacrifices being made by U.S. soldiers and civilians.

The discussions held in May on governance, security, economic and social development, and regional issues built on past sessions of the United States–Afghanistan Strategic Dialogue. During these discussions, President Obama and President Karzai reaffirmed their growing cooperation and their commitment to the solid, broad, and enduring strategic partnership between the governments and peoples of the United States and Afghanistan. This partnership is based on shared interests and objectives, as well as mutual respect. The two sides declared that a sovereign, stable, secure, peaceful, and economically viable Afghanistan that has friendly relations with all its neighbors and countries in the region is vital to regional stability and global security.

President Obama and President Karzai's joint statement of May 12 highlighted several key points in the area of security. The two Presidents recognized the importance of the Afghan Government to assuming increasing responsibility for security. They further recognized that developing ANSF capabilities is necessary to facilitate an orderly, conditions-based security transition process. Additionally, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to transitioning responsibility for detention facilities to the Afghan Government. Finally, President Obama and President Karzai recognized the importance of Afghan-led peace and reconciliation efforts.

The Afghan Government's next opportunity to demonstrate progress toward meeting the commitments made in London will be the Kabul Conference in July. Eighty international delegations will be on hand for the Kabul conference, at which the Afghans will present plans for integrated progress in governance and development across four ministerial clusters. We also expect to hear from President Karzai regarding actions taken to address corruption. Finally, we expect to hear President Karzai's plans for reconciliation and reintegration, based on the mandate he received from the Consultative Peace Jirga.

Afghan Attitudes

As a result of General McChrystal's shift to a counterinsurgency approach, the percentage of Afghan civilian casualties caused by Coalition actions has dropped substantially. This improvement has produced significant shifts in Afghan attitudes towards ISAF and Afghan forces. Compared to a year ago, polling suggests that Afghans are now more optimistic about the future and have greater confidence in the ability of the Afghan Government and their Coalition partners to prevail over the insurgency.

We have seen other positive indicators in the last year, as well. Of the 121 key terrain districts identified by ISAF in December 2009, 60 were assessed as sympathetic or neutral to the Afghan Government. By March of this year, that number had climbed to 73 districts.

Nonetheless, the Afghan public still considers government corruption a serious problem, and extends the blame to ISAF and the rest of the international community. Corruption in Afghanistan remains a widespread problem. As stated in DoD's April 2010, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, Afghanistan has achieved some progress in its anti-corruption efforts. But substantive change remains elusive.

Despite this and other serious problems that remain unaddressed, there are reasons for optimism. A national survey completed in March indicates that 59% of Afghans believe their government is headed in the right direction, an increase of 8% over September 2009.

Reintegration and Reconciliation

All parties to the conflict in Afghanistan recognize that there is a limit to what military activities alone can accomplish. In the end, some political resolution will be required to bring the conflict to a close. This recognition has driven the Afghan government's efforts to reconcile insurgent leaders and reintegrate low-level fighters.

This effort must be Afghan-led. In early April, President Karzai presented his interim plans for reintegrating lower-level insurgents who renounce violence and disassociate themselves from terrorists back into Afghan society. In May, a Consultative Peace Jirga, a traditional Afghan method of gaining national consensus, was held to address reconciliation. The Jirga's final report gave President Karzai a conditional mandate to pursue talks with the Taliban.

In recognition of this progress, the Department has released Afghan Reintegration Program Authority funding (authorized under the FY10 National Defense Authorization Act) to fund DoD reintegration activities in support of this Afghan government initiative. Along with contributions from the international reintegration trust fund, co-managed by the British and Japanese governments, the Afghan Reintegration Program Authority will play an important role in supporting reintegration opportunities as they emerge on the battlefield.

Looking Forward

Last week, Secretary Gates attended the informal NATO Defense Ministerial in Brussels. General McChrystal and Ambassador Sedwill have been charged with coordinating with the Afghan Government to develop a joint assessment process and a plan to begin a conditions-based transition process, and in Brussels last week, Ambassador Sedwill, the NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan, presented a concept for Afghanistan transition that was accepted by the NATO Ministers.

Following the July Kabul Conference, the Afghan Government will prepare for September Parliamentary elections. The international community will insist on transparency during this round of elections. The leadership and membership of the election commission has changed since the 2009 Presidential elections, and we believe that the Afghan Government understands the importance of demonstrating real progress in terms of holding free, fair, and transparent elections.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by underscoring our assessment that we are heading in the right direction in Afghanistan. We are regaining the initiative and the insurgency is beginning to lose momentum. That said, the outcome is far from determined. Approximately 54% of additional planned Coalition forces are now in place, but those troops still to come are critical to achieving success.

I want to repeat something I know I have said before: none of what we are doing in Afghanistan involves quick fixes. These are long-term problems, and their solutions will require patience, persistence and flexibility. At this point, though, I remain cautiously optimistic because the elements key to success are being put in place. As we move forward, we will continue to adjust – and I believe that we will continue to make progress. And I share Secretary Gates' confidence that General McChrystal will be able to show demonstrable progress by the end of this year.

We very much appreciate this Committee's continued support for our efforts. Congress is currently considering the Department of Defense's Fiscal Year 2011 budget request, including \$110.3 billion for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, as well as a supplemental request of \$28.8 billion for fiscal Year 2010, and we believe that these funds are critical to our success in Afghanistan. I appreciate the support this Committee has given, in its mark-up of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011, for full funding of the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund, and for the extension of Coalition Support Funds to reimburse Pakistan and other key nations that cooperate in contingency operations in Afghanistan. I would also encourage full funding of our CERP request as we see this authority as a key non-kinetic weapon in the counterinsurgency fight. I also appreciate the Senate's passage of the FY10 Supplemental Appropriations Act last month.

With your help, we have accomplished a great deal over the past year, but there is a great deal still to do.

Thank you once again for inviting us here today. I look forward to continuing to work together, and I welcome your questions and comments.